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COUNTRY: Belgian Congo
SUBJECT: Notes on Trips: Elizabethville to Costermansville to
Usumbura, Urundi

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1. [REDACTED] 1952: The plane ride up from Elizabethville to Costermansville was interesting. First we flew over country very much like that through which we had been driving. Then it gradually got wetter and wetter until we got over the true rainforest. Even there, there were surprisingly large grassy openings, some marshy, others probably cleared through encroachment of fire. We came down at Manono (a tin center), then at Kasongo on the Lualaba which is the upper Congo. Here, I felt for the first time, we were in Africa, because the native huts were along the side of the runway, and naked little boys were running around while the whole population turned out to see us. Then we came down at Kindu, another small airport in the middle of a tin area, then turned east to Costermansville, coming into the mountains. The rainforest soon disappeared and we came over a densely populated hilly area with rich red soil and banana groves between the closely spaced Kraals. We drove around the town. This is the Switzerland of Africa. The city is a sort of tourist center, retirement center, get-away-from-the-A-Bomb-center, booming like mad, atrocious architecture, worse roads, but lovely country.
2. The road from Costermansville to Usumbura, Urundi, follows along the west side of the Rift Valley, along the Ruzizi River for the first 30 or 40 miles. This is sensational country, very densely populated, with banana groves, contour terracing, closely spaced Kraals, everything green and lush. Everywhere there were long lines of men and women going into town with great burdens on their heads: the women often wearing only skirts, most of the men with some kind of European clothing, but occasionally only a loin cloth. Sometimes the hilly landscape appeared to be almost out of control: there were slippages of land, no contour plowing at all, just great fields on very steep slopes. Should this continue there will be a desert in 25 years.
3. Ruanda-Urundi is interesting in that it has the most densely populated areas of Central Africa (of all Africa outside of Egypt), and a very rapidly growing population as well. What is worse it has a cattle culture. It already has 2 or 3 times as many cattle as the land should support. In fifteen years the number will be doubled at the present rate of increase. The people would rather have poor cattle than fewer good cattle, so there is a real problem. The basis of the situation is not religious, but it is very closely tied in with the native political and social system. From the native standpoint the Watutsis are in control. They are the chiefs and the sub-chiefs. They own the cattle and let them out to the rest of the people who are chiefly Bantu. (The Watutsis are Hamitic - presumably from Galla in Ethiopia years ago, and possibly from Egypt earlier than that.) The more cattle there are, the

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more vassals the chiefs have, so their interest in numbers rather than quality is explained. Though we have not seen any Watutsis yet, we have seen many negroes with Watutsi features and build: long, thin semitic or Assyrian nose.

4. After about fifteen miles of fairly hilly country outside Costermansville, we began a sixteen and a half mile descent of the Kamaniola Escarpment - down the western side of the western Rift Valley. The road is known as the road of 300 turns (this is no exaggeration), and it has a unique signal system which keeps traffic moving only one way in each of about fifteen sections. A native is posted at a gate with an oil drum upon which he pounds in order to let the next man know that a car wants to come through. If there are no other cars coming, the gate is opened and one proceeds to the next one. We passed many cinchona trees (quinine trees) on European plantations on the way, and some coffee. Down in the valley, at half the elevation of Costermansville, the main commercial product is cotton. Manioc and bananas are grown for food. The valley is quite impressive, about 20 miles wide, very flat near Lake Tanganyika, with huge mountain ramparts on either side. At night fires dot the side.
5. We finally crossed into Urundi, and found the Hotel (Paguidas) at Usumbura, the Belgian capital of the two trusteeships of Ruanda and Urundi.

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